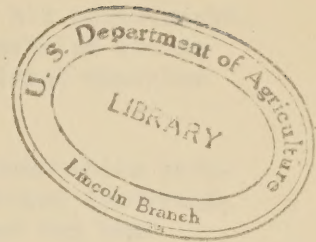


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Bureau of Agriculture Economics

RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP  
A Vital Part of the Home Front



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INTRODUCTORY

In a flight of geese the bird that flies at the apex of the V, governs the flock's direction, speed, and altitude. In human society, more complex group behavior is everywhere influenced by individual leaders in a somewhat similar fashion. A "professional" hobo, called "The Prof" (who admits that he had worked only 2 days in the 10 years before Pearl Harbor), nevertheless recently sold \$1,500 worth of War Bonds to fellow transients in a New York "hobo jungle". On the battlefield, where desperate alternatives often put incredible stress upon morale, the priceless ingredient of leadership tossed into the scales at the precise and unerring moment, is often decisive. In less spectacular ways leadership plays a part in every community every day - in home, church, school, club, and neighborhood.

Community service by public spirited citizens has meant much in the development of rural America; and it has contributed immeasurably to the present war effort. Numerous examples of outstanding rural community leadership have been observed at first hand in many counties in the northern Great Plains.

A small rural community in Colorado, consisting of about 100 farm families and some 50 village families, put on a scrap drive to "make sure that the 40 boys from the little community don't run out of ammunition or equipment." They had been given a quota of 100 pounds per capita. This was an outsider's notion of their part in the salvage drive. But it was not theirs. A group of neighborhood leaders organized a "scrap holiday," the whole community "pitched in", and a ton of scrap per capita was actually harvested. So much scrap was uncovered that it took two additional days to bring it in, with the whole community working at it. This small community was called "the scrappiest community in the world," and one boy in a rural school set a national

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record by contributing 36,086 pounds of scrap metal; he was awarded a trip to the coast to participate in a ship launching in recognition of his achievement. Nor was this all. The campaign organized by the leaders, and carried out so patriotically by all the people of this small community, stimulated numerous other communities to concerted effort.

This brief statement is based upon observation and experience while working on community organization, the group approach, and neighborhood leadership in many different counties. Professional workers in agriculture and home economics have helped with the interpretation of leadership patterns, and an attempt has been made to generalize objectively from this experience. In the interest of brevity tentative conclusions are outlined broadly and characteristics of effective local leaders are presented somewhat categorically. Professional workers can supplement the broad generalizations in this statement with practical experience, and personal observation.

#### SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Mobilizing Capable Leaders. The opportunity to lead is present in every organization which brings the citizens of a democratic community together. People are seeking to express themselves and to rise above a nominal or legal equality to a realization of their own intrinsic capacities. They have to be brought into effective group relationships, which are not always spontaneous but are the creation of those in the vanguard. Rural communities have many men and women in agriculture, business, and the professions who are experienced in community leadership. Some serve local voluntary association groups; some serve in community civic activities; some in rural neighborhood groups. Leadership shows itself in both formal and informal groups, and the real leaders sometimes hold no office. A large number of leaders in rural communities throughout the nation have come to the fore during World War II as a result of the activities of the Extension Service, the Defense Council, and other organizations.

One of the problems is that of persuading public-spirited citizens to make a start in constructive community leadership. As they understand the purpose and the possibilities of community organization from actual experience, interest usually follows. This means that someone must take the initiative in the early stages of its development. A small group of interested people can often be found who will discuss and promote an important community activity as a demonstration of community-wide effort. Intelligent selection of a community problem can be made if these persons will study the needs of the community and will take the advice of those more experienced.

second by contributing \$5,000 pounds of silver metal; he was awarded a trip to the coast to participate in a ship launching in recognition of his achievement. Not one day. The magazine organized by the leaders, and several other activities by all the people of this small community, stimulated numerous other communities to undertake efforts.

This brief statement is based upon observation and experience while working in community organization, the group movement, and neighborhood leadership in many different countries. Intellectual workers in agriculture and home economics have joined with the organization of leadership centers, and as attempts have been made to generalize objectively from this experience. In the interest of actively tentative conclusions are outlined broadly and characteristically of effective local leaders are presented somewhat categorically. Two functional workers are mentioned the broad generalization in this statement with practical experience, and personal observation.

### THEIR WORLD IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a social process. The conceptually to lead is present in every organization which brings the activities of a democratic community movement. People are seeking to express themselves and to rise above a national or local apathy to a realization of their own individual potentialities. They have to be brought into effective group relationships, which are not always spontaneous but are the creation of those in the movement. Local communities have many men and women in agriculture, business, and the professions who are experienced in community leadership. Some serve local voluntary association groups; some serve in community civic activities; some in rural neighborhood groups. Leadership shows itself in both formal and informal groups, and the rural leaders sometimes hold no office. A large number of leaders in rural communities throughout the nation have come to the fore during World War II as a result of the activities of the Extension Service, the Defense Council, and other organizations.

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Need for further Study of Leadership Techniques. It is axiomatic in adult education that if the student has not learned the teacher has not taught. It may likewise be said that unless the leader stimulates his followers to mental or physical action he is not leading. This may seem to be a dogmatic statement, but it has much truth in it.

Many people unconsciously use sound techniques of leadership in organized community activities. Trial and error methods of self-training have produced numerous effective leaders. Teaching by example is constantly in progress in community life and in organized groups. An Extension worker, for example, who is himself a good leader, unconsciously helps to develop rural leaders in the communities of the county. People generally, and youth in particular, are eager for example and instruction which they can accept and emulate. The assumption here is that training in leadership is possible. The plea is for attention to more systematic educational methods, to supplement hit and miss education by example. It is not easy to put leadership techniques into words, but it may be useful to generalize from the observed traits of many effective leaders in rural communities. The Extension worker can find numerous opportunities to make local leaders more effective in their community service. Evidence shows that leadership may be cultivated and taught. Small communities in which a few persons have thoroughly mastered the art of democratic leadership are making a very great contribution to their own communities and to the whole country. Professional leaders can play an important part in the development of additional local leaders in rural communities. They can help train the present leaders and thus make them more effective. Increased effectiveness and greater self-confidence will add to the satisfaction of these leaders, as their citizenship value to the community is enhanced.

Analysis of the experience of numerous professional workers and local leaders suggests that there are good techniques of leadership. For purposes of discussion, a few practical observations may be outlined. These are by no means exhaustive; neither are the techniques original or new. There is nothing complex or difficult about them, but their importance is sometimes overlooked because they are so simple. They are used in some way by all experienced leaders as common-sense techniques, but they are too often taken for granted when new leaders are given responsibility. Because of this there are many unnecessary failures and disappointments, and the service of valuable potential leaders is thus often lost. Two basic aspects of leadership are building good relationships and getting things done.

- (1) Building good relationships: An effective leader's interest in other people is manifest, as well as sincere. Most people respond to simple and unaffected expressions of friendliness. The leader's interest is revealed in little things, and because he shows an interest in folks they are interested in him. In some ways the people he deals with are like mirrors, reflecting his own attitude.



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(1) Building good relationships: An effective leader's interest in other people is genuine, as well as sincere. Most people respond to simple and unadorned expressions of friendliness. The leader's interest is revealed in little things, and because he knows of his interest in folks they are interested in him. In some ways the people he deals with are like mirrors, reflecting his own attitude.

The effective leader is positive and not negative. He usually gets better response by praising the good points of the person with whom he is talking, of other persons or groups, or of the situation being discussed. This is one of the vital contributions of the leader, and he need not be an outstanding person to serve his community. He makes positive use of such personality resources as he has. Others are not interested in what we do not know, do not have, cannot do, do not believe. They ask what can you do? What do you know? What do you have? What do you believe?

It is usually the practice of the effective leader to be personal. Each man is the center of the universe, to himself. So the leader tries to know his name, where he lives, about his family, his hobbies, his troubles, and his joys. We do not like to be "forgotten" men. When talking with a person the leader looks at him, notes what he is doing, talks his language, and seeks to learn about his problems.

The effective leader is confident. Most people are pretty human and decent, and are complimented by an appeal to their nobler motives. Folks differ widely, but the sincere leader with a good sense of humor, tolerance, and faith in his neighbors has the "wind and the tide with him" in his relations with others.

The effective leader seeks to build up the self-esteem of the other fellow. An old Quaker schoolmaster once said, "Always leave others thinking well of themselves." Many people are uncertain of themselves and need reassurance that they are doing well. When talking with another person the leader asks questions, not to "show off", but to help him to "show off".

- (2) Getting things done: The leader knows where he is going. He has a clear conception of the goal and the sequence of steps to the goal. General knowledge is not enough.

The leader's function is to give positive direction to the thinking of others. His own quiet enthusiasm is often an important factor in the other fellow's rating of an idea.

The effective leader listens and is alert to the reactions and attitude of the other fellow. These are not fixed and unalterable, but are affected by many things. Propaganda, weather, moods, and even popular superstitions modify them every day. Intelligent leadership often changes them for the better when tact and patience are employed.

The effective leader talks with and not at the other fellow. By using this technique and taking a little time the leader allows him the satisfaction of feeling that an idea was his. Furthermore, most of us are not good mind readers. People have often done more than they were expected to do, and the skillful leader tries to draw them out.



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The effective leader seeks to build up the self-esteem of the other fellow. An old Indian proverb says, "Many people are worried about thinking well of themselves." Many people are worried about themselves and need reassurance that they are doing well. When talking with another person the leader asks questions, not to "show off", but to help him to "show off".

(7) Setting things done: The leader knows where he is going. He has a clear conception of the goal and the sequence of steps to the goal. General knowledge is not enough.

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The effective leader assumes cooperation. He does not generally ask people if they will do it, but confidently assumes that they will. If he asks the other fellow whether he will, it may suggest that it is not well recognized as of great importance.

These brief suggestions assume capacity for leadership. There is no substitute for intelligence, initiative, integrity, and acceptability, but these are relative. They, of course, determine largely the skill and effectiveness with which the suggested techniques will be used, but the techniques for getting along with people and getting action do apply at all levels of leadership.

#### SYSTEMATIC ORGANIZATION OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Professional leaders in agriculture, home economics, education, religion, health, law, recreation, social welfare, and other fields have an opportunity, indeed an obligation, to discover and help train informed and responsible local leadership as one of the chief resources of the community. A public spirited member of this professional group, who has the community vision and a little organizing skill, has often communicated his vision to other members. He is effective to the extent to which he places the welfare of the community first. The professional group can mobilize the lay leadership for effective community planning and effort. Local leadership can be developed and organized in most communities to the advantage of all the interests in the community.

How can the numerous narrow group concerns and loyalties in the rural community be oriented to the larger community interest? The best way to accomplish this seems to be to get the people working and thinking about their common problems, and to see that through coordinated effort many of them can be solved. Some local group leaders and many of the rank and file of the members are not community minded. Community-mindedness can be developed by educational methods among professional leaders, who in turn can develop other leaders in the community.

Definite progress in community organization has been made in many communities during World War II. Some communities were well organized before that. The Extension Service and Community Defense Councils have made an effort to mobilize communities in a number of important war-time programs. There has also been progress in the coordination of the war efforts of the various communities within many counties. Community leadership in many counties has become more responsible and better informed. Much remains to be done, however, in the mobilization of rural people for effective participation in the war effort and community planning for the post-war period. This is largely a matter of leadership and organization. These should be representative of the communities including rural neighborhoods and organized groups of farm and nonfarm people. Community responsibility needs to be widely distributed and widely shared if community democracy is to have reality, and unless there is democracy in the community there can be little in the Nation. Individual activities should be well organized, and efforts of the different communities in the county should be coordinated through some overall county council or committee of responsible citizens. This provides an effective channel for democratic action and for the participation of all rural people.



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